Mass Customized Learning, or MCL, is a standard-based education system that uses powerful technology to help students learn and obtain their needs in the classroom. With MCL, the learning becomes personalized for each individual student. In a true MCL atmosphere, there would be no grade levels, since students would progress to different standards at different times based on proficiency; no letter grades, as they would show “evidence” of their learning than tests, quizzes, etc.; and the main focus is on the learning of the student. Students are grouped by their ability. This may sound like traditional tracking, but it is far from it, as students are constantly moving and regrouping when they display their mastery of a standard. To make sure that students are on the right course, some school system have set up a “teacher pace,” which is the minimum amount of work the student should have completed by a specific date set by the teacher. This is just a marker: students can go ahead when they are proficient at the certain standard.

Society is constantly evolving, the same way the goals and demands of education are evolving. The problem is the education system hasn’t changed, staying stagnant in the Industrial Age idea of “mass production,” a one-size-fits-all mentality that hinders students rather than help. Now, our generation is a part of the Digital Age, emphasizing the need of “mass customization.” We, as a society, are exposed to this phenomenon daily, as businesses have adopted this measure. There’s Amazon, Apple, Google, even Wal-Mart. All these companies have the capabilities to get the consumer exactly what they need individually to satisfy all needs, without any stress through the use of technology. The only logical move to improve the educational system is to embrace this technology and allow students to have personal autonomy with their learning that fits their needs.

In terms of education, MCL will provide the means for students to learn the way they feel is comfortable, and express their knowledge in away way of their choosing. The power will be given to the students, and the teacher will become a facilitator of their learning, addressing individual needs when necessary. Our job, then, is to encourage students to accomplish life-performance outcomes, and work with other facilitators to improve learning experiences. Letter grades would begin to diminish, as the emphasis is on the evidence. With the technology, students can create a digital portfolio of all the work they have completed and demonstrate their mastery of the content through that work.

Idealists would somewhat agree with the concept of Mass Customized Learning. The focus on learning within the individual vs. outside, and the focus on free will believed by idealists would fit well into the concept of MCL. These are all things that are a focus of MCL, by giving student’s choice and letting them determine their own learning. Although the focus on the great works throughout the ages that idealists also focus on would not go well with MCL, because there is a focus on creating a deeper understanding with the content for each student. Idealists may also disagree with the concept of MCL, because within MCL it is very student-centered, whereas within the philosophy of Idealism there is a focus on the ideas.

Realism would not really agree with MCL. Realism is about observation and experimentation, as well as the teacher as the role model. Within MCL, it is all about the teacher as a learning coach and facilitator, rather than a model. It is all-individual and based upon the student, which realists would not necessarily, agree with. However, they do focus on critical thinking, which is a piece of MCL, through students spending time engaging deeply with the content. Realists may also disagree with the idea of MCL because the teacher is expected to present the content to the students in a specific and organized way. MCL while it is organized in its own way, does not put much emphasis on the teacher as the purveyor of knowledge to students.

Pragmatists would agree with MCL, because they put a focus on a learner-centered curriculum and the teacher as a facilitator, which is what MCL is all about. Pragmatism puts an emphasis on learning how to question for a changing world, which is not quite, what MCL does. MCL is more about students engaging with the content, and demonstrating their mastery. However, MCL does put a focus on teaching students to question, and be independent thinkers, which is something that Pragmatists would agree with. The strategies of MCL enable students to not only think critically but to become their own thinkers; they question and challenge ideas instead of the traditional methods of lecture and memorization. Despite this, both pragmatists and MCL share the idea of student-centered curriculum, and teachers as learning facilitators.

Existentialists may agree somewhat with the concept of MCL because of its options and choices available for students. There is personal choice, and a move away from the numerical grading system, which might appeal to existentialists. MCL does focus on a learner-centered curriculum, while producing life-long learners who are independent thinkers, which is a concept that Existentialists may agree with. However, within MCL it is all about demonstrating knowledge of content, rather than finding meaning within oneself, which is a large focus on existentialism, therefore on this point they may disagree.

We were all concerned about our roles as a teacher, as we were unsure about what our job would become. But we all agreed that the shift of focus to student learning was a major plus for the students.

Mass Customized Learning is a topic that is sure to come up as we begin our roles as professional educators as the transition from educators being seen as ‘teachers’ begins to shift to the role of education ‘facilitators’. Many people are taking a look at the way in which our school systems are run and realizing there is a need for change. Julie Mathiesen, the director of Technology & Innovation in Education (TIE) describes the issue in the article ‘Mass Customized Learning: The key to education reform?’ by stating, “The current industrial age system of education is working perfectly if you’re looking for 25 percent skilled and 75 percent unskilled students-[or] if you’re looking to have around one million students fail to graduate high school every year. We need to completely revamp the system”. The article suggests that MCL may be the way to revamp the system, and since it is being discussed and implemented around the state of Maine, it is something we will likely come across in our professional careers. Mathiesen goes on to explain MCL by stating, “What if every day, every learner came to school and was met with customized learning activities at his or her precise developmental and achievement level, was learning in his or her most effective learning style with content of interest, was challenged, was successful, and left school eager to come back tomorrow?” (Source 1: Mass Customized Learning: The Key to Education Reform?). We can use MCL to help students develop critical thinking skills, understand what it is they need to know and be able to do, facilitate the fluid progression of students across the standards and units, and increase student access to learning tools. MCL can be useful to our careers because it allows us to design and work as educators to get students on the next level of critical thinking, and to create lessons and units in ways that allow students to work at their own pace.

MCL may initially seem intimidating for anyone, whether it be a long-term educator embarking on a change in his or her classroom or a first year teacher. When we interviewed Nancy Carr, the health teacher at T.W. Kelly Middle School, she said she began using MCL in December of 2012, and since then she has not worked this hard since her first year teaching. Some days she arrives at school at 6am and doesn’t finish her work for the day until midnight. Students require quick feedback in order for it to be meaningful, and keeping up with the progress of students who are all at different levels and working on different things can initially seem chaotic and impossibly time-consuming, but seeing it in person gave us a very different impression. Miss Carr has attended training sessions and visited schools that already implement MCL in order to improve the way she runs her 6-8th grade health classes. To Miss Carr, the most important thing a teacher can do to keep the transition to MCL smooth is to be incredibly organized and to have a good rapport with the students in which they respect the teacher and are cooperative to the changes being made in the transition to MCL. Having good practices such as these, and having the support of the school, parents, and community, MCL can have an incredible effect on the way that we interact with our students and implement personalized curriculums. Professional educators will be seen as facilitators of learning instead of lecture-teachers, and will develop deeper relationships with students as they work one-on-one to assist each student in reaching his or her goals.

MCL will also impact the ways in which we create and deliver lesson plans and units. The theories behind MCL cause use to take a deeper look at the standards and to ensure students know the purpose of their learning. We want students to have real-life connections to the content and to analyze how their work meets the standards. In a true MCL classroom, the numerical grading system would be replaced by online portfolios in which students create evidence that demonstrates their mastery of the content and their personal growth. This online portfolio would be available to parents 24/7 so they would no longer have to wait for report cards to check in on their child’s progress. Students have access to their learning and projects with online resources so that their learning can take place outside of the physical classroom and outside of classroom hours. Those who work at a quicker pace and complete the assessment projects before others have ‘extension projects’ in which they can deepen their understanding of the content and continue their learning. As future educators, this impacts our work because we must be sure that this additional learning, or extension project, is challenging, meaningful, and relevant. We will work to be sure it is not merely ‘extra work’, or ‘busy work’, which can cause a student to lose interest or see their hard work receiving a punishment instead of an option to further their interest and education.

As a group, the ideas and values behind Mass Customized Learning really applied to our personal beliefs and theories about education. MCL is very student-centered and encourages students to take on responsibilities and form a partnership with their teacher to take ownership of their education and interact with the content in meaningful ways. We agree with the idea of replacing the system of letter grades to instead implement evidence-based learning for students to demonstrate their mastery of the content and advancement in the standards. We learned that there is no ‘right way’ to implement MCL, but that as long as the teacher is organized and has a good relationship with students, he or she can find what works in their particular classroom and for their students to make MCL work for everyone involved. What MCL looks like in one school or one classroom may be very different from the next, but the common themes remain: that students are encouraged to become responsible for their own education, that the way in which a unit is delivered and the assessment used for the student should be tailored to meet his or her own personal needs and interests, that no student should be forced to “wait” until the others have caught up to their level nor should a student be rushed through content in a way that prevents him or her from actually learning it, and that teachers can be a valuable resource for students when they become facilitators of their education. MCL is not something that can be implemented recklessly. To make the transition to a true MCL style classroom, a teacher requires commitment, organization, and support to ensure that all students are offered a full curriculum (so as a fast-paced student does not reach a point where the teacher does not have a lesson ready), have their needs met in a timely manner (so that no one is left waiting and becomes uninterested or unengaged), receive immediate and meaningful feedback to improve their understanding, and clear expectations so that the class dynamic remains respectful and cooperative to promote the learning atmosphere that would benefit all students. These strategies are ones that we as a group would like to use in our classroom when we become true facilitators of education.